

U.S.-MEXICO BORDER ROUNDTABLE MEETING—GROUP 2
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
March 13, 2001

During Spring 2001, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) El Paso Border Office, the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) and the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) hosted a series of six roundtable discussions in Texas and New Mexico to solicit input from border communities regarding how binational border environmental issues should be addressed. Meetings were held in Laredo, Edinburg, Brownsville, and El Paso, Texas; and Las Cruces and Deming, New Mexico during March 2001. EPA and its Mexican counterpart, Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT), are currently working with the ten border states and U.S. tribes on a draft framework for the next border program based on the ideas and recommendations emerging from the roundtable discussions and other events. The following summarizes the roundtable session held in El Paso, Texas on March 13, 2001.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The U.S.-Mexico Border Roundtable Meeting was facilitated by Mr. Darrin Swartz-Larson, Director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 6 El Paso Border Office, Ms. Diana Borja, Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) Border Affairs, and Ms. Julie Suárez, El Paso Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The purpose of the Border Roundtable Meeting is to involve local stakeholders in the development of the new border program to be implemented in the year 2002. This approach to the program development process will foster generation of ideas, suggestions, and comments of local community stakeholders, which will result in the creation of a plan effective in dealing with their unique environmental issues.

Mr. Swartz-Larson, EPA, made a presentation on the current Border XXI Program and plans for development of the new border program plan. Ms. Suárez facilitated a group discussion designed to foster input from local community stakeholders regarding the new border program.

PRESENTATION ON THE STATUS OF THE BORDER XXI PROGRAM

Overview and Background of the U.S.-Mexico Border XXI Program

- Binational program initiated in 1996
- Legal Foundation: La Paz Agreement of 1983
- Border XXI Program implemented through a voluntary, coordinating mechanism

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- < The program is a strategy, a framework, a forum
- < The program does not create any new laws or rights
- EPA and SEMARNAT (formerly SEMARNAP—*Secretaría de Medio Ambiente, Recursos Naturales y Pesca*) are the lead agencies. Other participants include:
 - < Other Federal agencies:
 - Department of Health and Human Services (U.S.)
 - Secretariat of Health (Mexico)
 - Department of Interior (U.S.)
 - International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC)
 - < State and tribal partners
 - < Local and community stakeholders

Mission of the New Border XXI Program

- To work cooperatively toward sustainable development—meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs—through (1) the protection of human health and the environment and (2) proper management of natural resources.

Strategies of the New Border XXI Program

- Ensuring public involvement
- Building local capacity and decentralizing environmental management
- Ensuring interagency cooperation

New Border XXI Program Workgroups

- Air Workgroup
- Contingency Planning and Emergency Response Workgroup
- Cooperative Enforcement and Compliance Workgroup
- Environmental Health Workgroup

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- Environmental Information Resources Workgroup
- Hazardous and Solid Waste Workgroup
- Natural Resources Workgroup
- Pollution Prevention Workgroup
- Water Workgroup

Road to New Border XXI Program Plan

- ***Stakeholder involvement.*** The involvement of stakeholders is the primary goal for the development of the new Border XXI Program. Stakeholders include:
 - < States and tribes
 - < Local jurisdictions
 - < Community members (public)
 - < Environmental justice (EJ) and community-based organizations
 - < Non-governmental organizations (NGO)
 - < Industry and local businesses
 - < Academia—Public school systems and universities
- ***Options for the Structure of the New Border XXI Program***
 - < Continue with current structure
 - < Modify current structure
 - < Implement a regional approach
 - < Others
- ***Time frame***

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- < Border roundtable meetings to be held from August 2000 through March 2001
- < Briefing of the incoming administration from December 2000 through May 2001
- < Public meetings to be held in Fall 2001 before the New Border XXI Plan is drafted to receive stakeholder input for the plan
- < Preparation of the Draft Border XXI Program Plan beginning in Winter 2001
- < Solicitation of comments on the Draft Plan
- < Finalization and implementation of the New Border XXI Program Plan

GROUP DISCUSSION

A group discussion followed the opening presentation to solicit input from local community stakeholders regarding current border environmental issues and the new border program plan. This section summarizes the comments made by stakeholders during the discussion period. As a result of comments and suggestions received during the first three roundtable meetings held in Laredo, Edinburg, and Brownsville, Texas, the last three discussion questions were revised.

What are the most critical binational border environmental and human health issues in this area? (i.e., what issues will require U.S. and Mexican collaboration and cooperation to address?)

- Air quality
- Water issues
- Water quality and quantity
 - < Conservation
 - < Remediation and restoration of Rio Grande
 - < Management of wastewater in smaller cities, rural areas, and colonias; lack of waste infrastructure in these areas
- Quality of life
- Availability of funding

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- Environmental health issues
- Hazardous waste management, disposal and transportation
- Education and public outreach on issues
- Sustainable development that promotes incentives for implementation of best management practices in meeting mandates regarding water conservation
- Redefining region to better represent a watershed approach to environmental management
- Issues related to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)
 - < Defining the cost of serving as a “doormat” for the rest of the nation
 - < EPA and U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) working more effectively together
 - < Needs for increased infrastructure
 - < Increased traffic affecting local quality of life
 - < Enforcement
 - < Improved communication among all stakeholders

Who should be part of an effort to identify and prioritize the most critical environmental and human health issues in this area?

- Legislators
- Elected city and county officials
- Decision makers
- Regulators
- Citizens
- Community groups

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- Financial institutions
- Other federal agencies, such as U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), U.S. Department of Interior (DOI), U.S. Treasury Department, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- Industry sector
- State agencies
 - < Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs
 - < League of Woman Voters for education and communication to other womens' groups
 - < Texas Railroad Commission
- Academia
 - < New Mexico State University (NMSU)
 - < University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP)
 - < Universidad Autonoma de Cd. Juárez
 - < Texas A&M
 - < Public school districts
- City and county health officials
- Environmental organizations
- U.S. Border Counties Coalition
- Pan-American Health Organization
- Western Governor's Association
- Mexican counterparts at all levels of government
- Migrant farmworkers
- El Paso Electric
- County attorney offices

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- U.S. International Border Water Commission (IBWC)
- ASARCO
- Southwest Center for Environmental Research and Policy (SCERP)

Would you like to participate or carry out binational environmental and human health efforts? Is so, how would you like to participate? If not, what would make you more interested in participating?

Comments specifically addressing this discussion question were not recorded. Rather, comments were combined with the following question.

In this area of the border, what types of binational efforts have worked? What has made them successful? What efforts have not worked and why?

- Successes
 - < “Three B’s”
 - The current Border XXI Program has been “binational” in nature as well as name.
 - The current Border XXI Program has “brought” more funding dollars to the region.
 - The current Border XXI Program has focused on “building” capacity.
 - < The current Border XXI Program has involved local governments to some extent.
 - < Pollution prevention workshops have increased awareness in various commercial industries.
 - < When Water Works for Health
 - < Paso del Norte Health Foundation
 - < *Aqua para Beber* (winner of the Texas Environmental Award), a one-on-one teaching through colorfully illustrated comic books
 - < Project del Rio
 - < Ozone Action Days

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- < Watt Watchers—energy conservation (UTEP Energy Center)
- < Dedicated commuter lane
- < Sister City Plans
- < Joint Advisory Committee(JAC)
- < Clean Cities Coalition
- What has not worked?
 - < Information from research studies, such as from the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) does not get back to community
 - < Border XXI Environmental Indicators need to be clarified
 - < Consultants hired from outside the area do not know the area
 - < Air quality efforts have not been true binational efforts

What must the next binational border programs include to be successful?

- More emphasis on specific, rather than general, initiatives
- More advertisement of resources and events, such as public meetings
- Greater cooperation in the transfer and sharing of data
- Implementation of projects that benefit both sides of the border
- More binational collaboration before binational meetings are held in order to prevent non-unified points
- The future Border XXI Program Plan should not be reinvented after five years. Rather, a consultative and cooperative process should be implemented permanently but modified, as needed.

CLOSING REMARKS

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In closing, meeting participants were encouraged to contact EPA and TNRCC directly with additional comments and suggestions. They were also advised that information, comments, and suggestions presented at the roundtable discussion would be incorporated into an option format that will be used to develop the next border program plan. A draft plan is expected in January 2002.